What the South Has Done About Its History[1]

By E. MERTON COULTER

The South has often been referred to as a virgin field for the historian. Other sections of the country have written almost the minutest details of their history or suffered others to do it, even to magnifying the Boston Tea Party and Paul Revere's Ride into an importance which has permeated the national consciousness, while the South has permitted its history to lie unworked and many of its major figures and movements to remain to this day "unhonored and unsung."

There are certain factors which enter into the growth of a new nation and a civilization, which operate rather uniformily, and which must apply, therefore, somewhat equally to the South, the East, the North, and the West—or to whatever sections we may choose to include in our sum total. It is a truism that a country without a history cannot write it, and, of course, the younger a country is, the less there is to write about or to be interested in. The writing of a nation's history is reminiscing for that nation, and it is a well-known fact that only old and oldish people do much reminiscing. As *De Bow's Review* said in 1853, "It is not in the buoyancy of youth that men or nations look back on the past."[2]

Yet the North, and New England especially, early began to look back on their short past and they soon discovered that it was heroic and that

[1] This paper was read as the presidential address before the Southern Historical Association in Birmingham, Alabama, October 25, 1935.

[2] *De Bow's Review* (New Orleans), XV (1853), 163.

there were giants in those days. They set to work writing about them. Realizing that in union there is strength, individuals early joining forces, organized historical societies, which first being state-wide, multiplied until scarcely a town in New England did not boast of such an organization. Histories accumulated until there was scarcely anything left to be written about. It is not necessary here to inquire into the reasons for these activities, hasty though entirely laudable. It is sufficient to say that the compact settlements made it possible, that the character of the people led them early to begin looking backward (as well as forward), and that their occupations developed a store of community spirit and a wealth of money.

In comparison with New England and the North, the South early fell behind in its historical consciousness, not because it was less old or had a less interesting or important past, but for reasons that will soon appear, some of which, apart from the comparison, operated everywhere to retard historical activity. Though racially the North and the South cannot be so simply described as Puritan and Cavalier, there were nevertheless important differences in the people who settled the two sections. A great many Southerners were Scotch-Irish or of Scotch-Irish descent, and it may not be held to the discredit of other strains to say that the Scotch-Irish exercised an influence in the South out of proportion to their numbers. These people and many other Southerners were individualistic and greatly lacking in self-consciousness. They had little of that introspection which characterized the New Englander and made him busy himself not only with his own affairs but also with the affairs of others. The Southerner was not community-minded, for he did not as a rule live in communities.

This fact suggests that the South developed a rural population and a civilization based almost entirely on agriculture. The people busied themselves in clearing the land and tilling the soil, largely isolated one from another. They thought in terms of their own problems and had little inclination to get interested in or to seek to examine what had gone before. There long remained in the South many elements of the frontier, and no frontier can become much interested in its history,

however long or short it may be. Only with that conservatism that comes with the long occupation of a region and the long association of people in communities, does the historical spirit assert itself.

Also a certain amount of leisure is requisite, and an attitude of mind untroubled and serene helps. The South has had little of either, despite a great deal of romancing to the contrary. Not until 1840 was the South rid of its Indian problems; the slavery issue was not settled until 1865; and then there followed the race question which is yet a matter of some concern. Much of the writing proclivities of Southerners in ante-bellum times was absorbed in a defense of slavery against Northern attacks. Without this disturbance it is conceivable that Calhoun might have written learnedly on the philosophy of history and Simms might have become a Southern Bancroft.

The restlessness that was bred by these conditions made the people prefer action to contemplation. Their genius sought expression, therefore, more in the excitement of politics. The embryo historians and history readers became politicians and statesmen. As a Southerner diagnosed the situation in 1853, "When the offices of the federal and state governments were filled, few men of distinguished abilities were left unemployed." Days of action and fame loomed up ahead. "Who would sit down in his quiet study, and endeavor with toil and pain to extract truth out of a mass of contradictory authorities, when the same energies directed in another channel might make him the ruler of a continent, the arbiter of the world?"[3] The apathy of Virginians toward their history was partly explained by a writer in 1847, who said, "We have seen it summarily accounted for by the fact, that the gentlemen and higher classes of Virginia are so much occupied with the duties of self-government and of governing others, that they have no time to spend over the records of past ages—that they who are acting history themselves, care not to read the histories of other men."[4]

But those who did attempt to write the South's history were imme-

[3] *Ibid.*, 162.

[4] *The Southern and Western Literary Messenger and Review* (Richmond), XIII (1847), 2. Cited hereafter as *Southern Literary Messenger.*

diately confronted with a situation which could be counted on to wither the keenest zeal.[5] The records of the past were scattered and many of them had been destroyed. A people not much interested in their past will take few pains to preserve their current records and even fewer to save old documents. Why should those with little self-consciousness, who want no heroes to worship and who think objectively care to save the musty records of the past out of which unwanted heroes could be made? Not looking for heroes in the past, they were not even interested in making heroes out of themselves; therefore, there was no passion to preserve family archives. The progression of plantations westward led families to discard their old papers as the least desirable impedimenta. And what was even worse, this unconcern for the past led to a woeful carelessness in public officials in preserving the records of the government. After the current value of documents had passed, they were discarded to an attic or basement, there to rest undisturbed until accumulating in such quantities they became a nuisance. This problem was then solved either piecemeal by some janitor using them as a store of fuel for kindling fires, or all at once, like Tennessee, which cut the Gordian knot as late as the twentieth century by selling them as waste paper.[6]

Aiding this carelessness of private individuals and of governmental officials were forces which could not easily be controlled. Wars, fires, and migrating state capitols wrought sad havoc with the South's records. The South has suffered two wars of invasion, which scattered and destroyed state archives. In the Revolution, Georgia was able to carry part of her records to a place of safety, but so far away that she was unable to recover them for some years afterwards; and in the Civil War she saw many of her records pillaged and carried away by Sherman's soldiery, and even to this day their conscience-stricken descendants are

[5] In writing his history of Alabama in the 1840's, Albert J. Pickett almost gave up in despair as he was unable to find the documents necessary for his story; and William Bacon Stevens was forced greatly to delay his work on the history of Georgia while he sought for historical material.

[6] P. M. Hamer, "The Preservation of Tennessee History," in *North Carolina Historical Review*, VI (1929), 127.

returning the plunder. But it has been from fires more than from wars that the South has suffered. The flames that destroyed the capitols of Texas and Louisiana deprived succeeding generations of many priceless records and consigned to darkness much that was important. Pathetic is the story of county and parish archives, the records that come nearest the lives of the people. Chronically suffering from the carelessness of local officials, they have gone up in smoke from one end of the South to the other. North Carolina has had no fewer than thirty-three courthouse fires.[7] For many years the moving population of the South carried state capitols not far behind. The instability of all material things long characterized the South. There is not a state in the South today which has not changed the site of its first capitol. Georgia has had no fewer than five separate state capitols, migrating from Savannah, on the coast, to Atlanta, on the edge of the mountains. It is not difficult to imagine what happened to the state archives when capitols were moved.

This recounting of the South's historical apathy and woes, happily is not the whole story. With all these handicaps, there has been appreciation and progress, and flashes of an historical outlook equal to the best. The South has written histories, collected documents, organized historical societies, and published historical articles and magazines. The South of colonial days had few incentives to be interested in its history; it had no nationalism or even a spirit of nationalism, and it had only a short past, which had no special appeal. Yet Virginia could have a feeling of some age and a desire to look back upon it, for she had lived longer as a colony of England than she has as a part of the American Union; and this historical spirit was felt by Robert Beverly in 1722 and William Stith in 1747, when each brought out his history of Virginia. No other Southern colony had a history sufficiently heroic to lead to its being written.

The Revolution came, American nationalism was born and established, the age of heroes arrived, and the first widespread impulse in the South to write its history began. But it was to be state history, for

[7] J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "The Preservation of North Carolina History," *ibid.*, IV (1927), 4, 5.

though the South might early have had a sectional feeling of unity, it was not strong enough to break over state lines in the concept of its history until after the Civil War. In every Southern state, the generation following the Revolution saw its history written, and though these histories naturally included colonial times, the Revolution was the heart and the impulse. These histories were written because there were, of course, heroes to be honored, but also because justice must be done to the state in the part it played in the struggle; and those states that had been arrogating too much to themselves must be corrected. In 1804-1805 John Burk published his *History of Virginia, from its First Settlement to the Present Day,* in three volumes; in 1812 Hugh Williamson published his *History of North Carolina,* in two volumes; in 1809 David Ramsay published in two volumes his *History of South Carolina, from its First Settlement in 1670, to the Year 1808.* In Georgia, scarcely had the Revolution ended before Edward Langworthy was busily planning his "Political History of the State of Georgia. From its First Settlement. With Memoirs of the Principal Transactions which Happened therein during the late Revolution." He wrote because "He could no longer silently observe several respectable writers, either through misinformation or ignorance, injuring the reputation of his Country—a country though not generally known yet of no small importance in the American Revolution."[8] Unfortunately this work was never completed and the valuable collection of historical material assembled by Langworthy disappeared; but Hugh M'Call in 1811 and 1816 published in two volumes *The History of Georgia, Containing Sketches of the most Remarkable Events up to the Present Day.*

Most of these men wrote their histories under great difficulties, and when their work was finished they felt that they received no rewards in an appreciative public. For some years there was none so bold as to make further attempts. The next histories to appear were for the newer states, which had not yet been honored with a written history. In 1823

[8] L. L. Mackall, "Edward Langworthy and the First Attempt to Write a Separate History of Georgia, with Selections from the Long Lost Langworthy Papers," in *Georgia Historical Quarterly,* VII (1923), 1-17.

John Haywood's *Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee* appeared, and the next year Kentuckians were presented their history in two volumes by Humphrey Marshall,[9] to be followed ten years later by the work of Mann Butler.[10] The French-born François Xavier Martin, impartial in his interests, wrote in 1827 the first pretentious history of Louisiana[11] and two years later wrote another history of North Carolina.[12] Maryland waited until 1837 for her first formal history, written by L. L. Bozman.[13]

For the two decades preceding the Civil War, there was considerable activity in state history writing. William H. Foote, born in Connecticut, wrote his *Sketches of North Carolina* in 1846 and in 1850 his *Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical.* In the 1850's two more histories of North Carolina appeared, one by Francis L. Hawks and the other by John H. Wheeler.[14] The novelist, poet, and historian, William Gilmore Simms, presented his state in 1840 with a new *History of South Carolina.* Aided by the state government, Joseph V. Bevan in the 1820's set about collecting historical material for a history of Georgia, but he died without producing tangible results; and in the early 1830's Alexander Jones sought to succeed where Bevan had failed, but nothing came of it.[15] It remained for William Bacon Stevens to bring out the next history of Georgia, which appeared in two volumes in 1847 and 1859.[16] The other ante-bellum Georgia historian was George White, an Episcopal rector, who brought out in 1849 his *Statistics of the State of Georgia* and in 1854 his *Historical Collections of the State of Georgia.* Albert J. Pickett was Alabama's most famous historian of early times, and it was he who in 1851 brought out the first

[9] *History of Kentucky.*

[10] *History of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.*

[11] *History of Louisiana,* 2 vols.

[12] *History of North Carolina, from the Earliest Period,* 2 vols.

[13] *History of Maryland,* 2 vols.

[14] Respectively, *History of North Carolina,* 2 vols., and *Historical Sketches of North Carolina, from 1584 to 1851,* 2 vols.

[15] T. H. Jack, "The Preservation of Georgia History," in *North Carolina Historical Review,* IV (1927), 241.

[16] *A History of Georgia from its First Discovery by Europeans to the Adoption of the Constitution in MDCCXCVIII.*

history of the state.[17] The first native historian of Louisiana and the most famous was Charles Gayarré, who brought out in 1846, in two volumes, his *Histoire de la Louisiane.* Texas, late in the field as an American state, found two historians in the 1840's in Henry S. Foote and H. Yoakum.[18] Following Tennessee's historian Haywood was J. G. M. Ramsey, who in 1853 brought out his *Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century.* Lewis Collins produced his *Historical Sketches of Kentucky* in 1848. In Florida, Mississippi, and Arkansas no historians arose to favor those states with their histories. Not all of these historical works on the ante-bellum South were produced by native Southerners, though most of them were residents of the states whereof they wrote. Most of the historical writing in the ante-bellum South was in the form of state histories; there were few biographies and no sectional histories. Indeed, up to this moment there has been published no complete history of the South as a region. None of these histories was received with the enthusiasm desired or expected by their authors; and there may be partly an explanation for the historical apathy in the South in the reason given by a Southerner in 1847, that is, the absence "of any well-written narrative of any readable book."[19]

These writings were not unaccompanied and unaided by other historical activities. The "Miraculous Thirties" saw the beginning of the state historical societies in the South. Starting with the organization of the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1791 the movement spread throughout a half-dozen Northern states before the first society grew up in the South. The honor of being first goes to Virginia, which set up in 1831 the Virginia Historical and Philosophical Society; in 1847 it was reorganized and given its present name. In 1833 the North Carolina Historical Society was organized and was reorganized in 1844 as the Historical Society of the University of North Carolina and again remade in 1875. The Louisiana Historical Society began in 1836; two

[17] *History of Alabama, and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi,* 2 vols.

[18] Their works are respectively, *Texas and the Texans: or, Advance of the Anglo-Americans to the Southwest,* 2 vols., and *History of Texas, from its First Settlement in 1685, to its Annexation to the United States in 1846,* 2 vols.

[19] *Southern Literary Messenger,* XIII (1847), 2.

years later the Kentucky State Historical Society was incorporated, and the next year the Georgia Historical Society was founded.

Thus, the 1830's saw the organization of five historical societies in the South. Five more were set up during the next two decades: the Tennessee Historical Society in 1849, which was the successor to the Tennessee Antiquarian Society founded in 1819; the Alabama Historical Society in 1850; the South Carolina Historical Society in 1855; the Historical Society of Florida in 1856; and the Historical Society of Mississippi in 1858. The other Southern states were to wait until after the Civil War to begin organized historical activities. With a slight variation, the age and strength of these societies were closely related to the age of the state.

Immediately the question arises: Why were these societies formed and what purpose did they serve? A definite and direct cause for the organization of some of them may be seen in the reason for the writing of the first state histories: The states should conserve and defend their reputation in the Revolution. It also should be noted that the states were beginning to feel oldish and they would take some pride in their past. But more directly there appeared to be an important and immediate work to be done in order more effectively to secure the general purpose. These societies would collect and preserve the historical records of the state and they would even send agents to European archives for copies of relevant documents not in America, they would publish documentary collections, and through this work and by other means they would encourage the writing of histories.

Despite the apathy and carelessness of the South in general in preserving its records, there were in ante-bellum times those farseers who had all the zeal of a present-day collector for conserving documents. A historically-minded Southerner in 1843 bemoaned the waste and loss of historical material and observed that if earlier efforts had been made, "how much, that is now irrevocably lost, would have been preserved to enrich and augment" his country's annals.[20]

[20] *Southern Quarterly Review* (Charleston), III (1843), 42.

There were notable examples of individuals who made historical collections, such as I. K. Tefft, A. A. Smets, and George Wymberley Jones De Renne and his son Wymberley Jones De Renne, in Georgia; but it was felt that the most successful and most desirable work of this sort should be carried on by historical organizations. So, it became the first interest of these historical societies to gather up the scattered records of the state. How inclusive were their wants and how thoroughly they understood the records on which history should be based are illustrated by this call sent out by the Georgia Historical Society at its organization in 1839: legislative journals; proceedings of conventions, committees, and councils, statutes of the colony and the state; Indian treaties; medical journals, statistics of births, deaths, and records relating to the blind, the deaf, and the dumb; accounts of epidemics; catalogues of medical colleges and of other schools; histories of towns and counties; maps, surveys, and charts; meteorological observations; reports of geological and mineralogical surveys; records of the Indians, their manners, customs, battles, traditions, and their place names; sketches of all the eminent people who have lived in the state, and genealogical records; educational records and minutes of scientific and literary associations, sermons, tracts, essays, pamphlets, poems, magazines, almanacs, and newspapers from the earliest times; military records of every nature; every sort of religious record, such as proceedings of conventions, assemblies, synods, conferences, and the histories of individual churches. The appeal was closed with the following reminder: The committee

> solicit contributions of books, manuscripts, pamphlets, newspapers, and everything which can elucidate the history of America generally, as well as Georgia in particular; and they sincerely hope that this call upon the liberality of all who love the honor of our commonwealth, and desire to perpetuate the faithful records of her existence, will be responded to, with an ardor that will ensure the complete success of the GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY.[21]

The service rendered by these societies in the collection and preservation of historical documents has been outstanding, and this work alone has amply justified their existence. In their zeal to secure every-

[21] *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society* (Savannah), I (1840), 303-305.

thing that might illustrate state history, they sent their agents to England, France, and Spain to secure copies of documents in the archives of those nations. The most notable example of promoting this sort of work in ante-bellum times is to be seen in the case of the Louisiana Historical Society. The Georgia Historical Society became the custodian of the copies of many records which the state government had secured in England.

Though these societies felt that their first duty was to collect historical material, they also believed they should publish selections from it. The state of historical fermentation in ante-bellum times did not suggest or make possible the publication of a review or a magazine, after the modern-day methods. The desirability of publishing something was evident to all these societies, but as some were weak and none was very strong, only three published before the Civil War material of any consequence. Virginia was the most prolific. She published in 1833 a volume of *Collections;* from 1848 to 1853 six volumes of the *Register;* and from 1854 to 1860 two volumes of the *Reporter.* Georgia published three volumes of her *Collections,* beginning in 1840; and South Carolina brought out three volumes of *Collections* from 1857 to 1859. By making available their libraries to the historical investigator, these societies promoted the writing of better histories. The Georgia Historical Society soon after its organization, realizing the inadequacy of M'Call's history of the state, requested one of its members, William Bacon Stevens, to prepare a new and complete history. In its rich stores of material Stevens worked and largely as a result of the Society's patronage he produced a history which is considered a classic on the period covered.

In ante-bellum times these historical societies had no connection with the state governments, which were too much busied with political affairs to care much about promoting such impractical undertakings as historical societies advocated. Most of the states did not have the vision to preserve properly even their own official records; but there are some instances where the value of historical undertakings was recognized. South Carolina seems to have been more liberal than any of the other

Southern states. From the earliest times the Carolina government had taken care to preserve its official documents, and it gave at various times specific monetary aid to certain historical publications. It appropriated two thousand dollars to aid B. R. Carroll in bringing out his *Historical Collections of South Carolina,* and it also afforded financial aid to R. W. Gibbes for his *Documentary History of the American Revolution,* and to the South Carolina Historical Society for its *Collections.*[22]

Though there were no strictly historical magazines in ante-bellum times, there were, nevertheless, literary periodicals which gave much attention to history and to the cultivation of the "historical spirit." Some were of only local importance, but there were others which circulated throughout the South, and in this fact is to be discerned a development which would lift history out of its state pockets and give it a wider significance. The *Orion,* published in Penfield, Georgia, gave considerable attention to history, and various other local publications did likewise, but the influence and importance of such journals as *De Bow's Review,* the *Southern Literary Messenger,* the *Southern Quarterly Review,* and the *Southern and Western Monthly Magazine and Review* were widespread. Here was an outlet not only for regular historical narrators, but also for those who would philosophize about history. There was not a total lack of interest and thought in the South in the interpretations of history that were being pronounced by European historical philosophers, and in the writings of historians everywhere. In 1843 a contributor to the *Southern Quarterly Review*[23] noted at length Frederick von Schlegel's *Philosophy of History; in a Course of Lectures,* the occasion being the publication of a translation in 1841. C. S. S. Farrar, of Louisiana, in 1848, taking as his starting point Victor Cousin's *Introduction to the History of Philosophy,* discussed through a half dozen numbers of *De Bow's Review*[24] the question whether history was a science. Farrar found it difficult to agree with Cousin that

[22] A. S. Salley, Jr., "Preservation of South Carolina History," in *North Carolina Historical Review,* IV (1927), 148 ff.

[23] Vol. III (1843), 263 ff.

[24] Vol. V (1848).

history was a positive science instead of being "lawless and arbitrary." Neither Guizot's *General History of Civilization in Europe,* nor George Bancroft's *History of the United States* escaped general notice in the South, and the latter came in for severe criticism in some quarters.

But what did those people in the South who cared to have an opinion think about history, apart from whether it be a science or not? What should be its content and what its purpose? There was some difference of views then as now, but there was much said then which many people unwittingly think is modern. The tendency then as now among the less erudite was to assign to history the chief purpose of making the past grand and glorious and all of its figures heroes, and therefore it should make the present and future have occasion for loving their country.[25] Among the more thoughtful a revolt was developing against the practice of making of history only a heroic story of kings and battles. S. Henry Dickson, of Charleston, South Carolina, in "An Essay on the Difficulties in the Way of the Historian," said in 1846:

By the tradition and history of former years, while the deeds of the gentle and the lofty are loudly sung and fondly repeated, the lowest classes of every nation have been unnoticed, unless to be numbered, as by David, and taxed, as the whole world was by Augustus Caesar.

. . . While we peruse the writings of past ages, we ask involuntarily and ask in vain, where are the people?—here is a phantasmagoria of kings and nobles—priests and councillors—knights, and merchants, and squires—and the immediate retainers and dependents of these, as soldiers and servants; but where are the millions?—how do they live, and in what offices are they employed?[26]

Twenty years later this philosophy was being preached:

For instance, from reading the histories extant of Egypt, Greece and Carthage, one might suppose that these powers did nothing but wage war and plot each others downfall. . . . It should be the object of the historian to present a clear, distinct and vivid picture of the times concerning which he writes. He should portray the home life of the common people as well as the ceremonies and pageants of courts. He should tell us what were their means of support, what comforts they enjoyed, and what were their pleasures. No circumstances should be deemed too trivial which will in any wise illustrate the subject. Such homely

[25] For example, see "Judge Law's Oration before the Georgia Historical Society, February 12, 1840," in *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society,* I (1840), 1-41.

[26] *Southern Literary Messenger,* XII (1846), 110.

themes some consider beneath the dignity of history; but the main springs of national action lie in the character, habits and wants of the common people, and no one who disregards these can hope to have an understanding of the causes from which greater events proceed.[27]

Yet there were those who much earlier perceived a spirit in history that was becoming broad and philosophical. In 1837 in "An Address Delivered before the Virginia Historical and Philosophical Society," Thomas W. Gilmer said, in a manner that sounds very modern:

History is now associated with philosophy; with that philosophy which scans with microscopic severity the deep current of public events; which traces out moral effects to their causes and their consequences; which analyzes the mysterious and complex fabric of society; which investigates and establishes truth; which discriminates justly between the transient prejudice of an hour and the enduring sentiment of ages.[28]

But with all the thoughts and actions of the ante-bellum South, practical historical activities and developments never got far beyond state lines. The slavery system and the attacks of the North upon it, welded the Southern states into a spiritual unity on that subject, but they still thought of their history largely within state lines. They wrote much to defend Southern institutions and Southern civilization, but no one thought of writing a Southern history or of organizing a Southern historical society. In 1861 civil war came and then the people forgot all about the writing of history; instead, they began making history. They lost the war and their nationality, but they went through an experience which touched profounder depths and involved more fundamental principles than had come into their lives since the planting of Jamestown. Here in the course of four years enough history had been made to keep many generations busy investigating and writing it; and here was something for those who liked heroic history and much for those who liked to philosophize on cause and consequence. But there was even more; for here was the great task to see that the truth be told and the record kept straight. Out of the crucible of war there was born a sense of unity in their history; and so now, their history could become regional instead

[27] L. L. Veazey, "History," in *Scott's Monthly Magazine* (Atlanta), I (1866), 208.
[28] *Southern Literary Messenger*, III (1837), 97.

of state, just as their feelings in ante-bellum times had become sectional instead of state.

The most immediate effect the war had on the historical consciousness of the South was the writing of the lives and war experiences of the heroes by the heroes themselves and by others and the recounting of the campaigns by the leaders. Writers produced lives of "Stonewall" Jackson even before the end of the war, but no one could have planned much earlier the history of the conflict than James B. McCabe, Jr., who said, "In May, 1861, I commenced to collect such papers and documents, both official and unofficial, relating to the war, as I could procure." By the end of the struggle he had on hand more than fifteen thousand papers and documents, and in 1866 he brought out the *Life and Campaigns of General Robert E. Lee.*[29] Immediately after the war General Lee considered writing a history of his campaigns, solely as a last tribute to his men, and he asked other leaders to write their campaigns. For a time Lee set about systematically collecting reports and documents; but he found it very difficult to secure some necessary material. It is said that he was refused by the war department the use of documents which it had, but no positive proof has been found so far that Lee ever applied.[30] Lee gradually gave up his intention of writing his history, but many of the other Confederate leaders, following his advice, wrote their accounts, some for glory, some for money, some to defend their reputations, and some only for the love of it.

Most of the writings by the war generation were deeply tinged with the defense element, and especially was this so with those who wrote civil and political history. Alexander H. Stephens wrote two volumes in his *Constitutional View of the War Between the States*[31] to show the justice of the South's course, and Jefferson Davis wrote his two volumes on the *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government,* largely for the same purpose.[32]

[29] See page 3 of the book. Published in Atlanta, by the National Publishing Company.
[30] D. S. Freeman, *R. E. Lee. A Biography* (New York, 1935), IV, 213, 235, 236.
[31] Published in 1868 and 1870.
[32] Published in 1881.

The North, having won the war on the battlefield, immediately set out to win it again and consolidate victory on the printed page. A flood of books appeared, and the South took umbrage at most of them. A new invasion was on, and the South must meet words with words—but words based on historical facts. Said Edward A. Pollard in 1866, "All persons in the South who assist in getting the true testimony of their unfortunate struggle, perform a last, but most important office of faithful love, and do a noble work in rescuing the name of a lost cause from the slanders of those who, having been our accusers and executioners in this present time, would also be our judges at the Bar of History."[33] And ten years later R. Randolph Stevenson was saying, "The Southern actors in the great struggle would be recreant to the duty which they owe to their posterity, were they to permit the false allegations of the Northern historians to be accepted as true without attempting a refutation and vindication."[34]

History now took on for Southerners a more practical character than had ever appeared before in all the annals of the South. It was the last stronghold of the South not for the defense of its nationality but for the protection of something more dear and sacred, its reputation. Defeated on the battlefields, it was again suffering in Reconstruction the defeat of its reasonable expectations of an honorable peace. With Jefferson Davis destined never to be tried, and the Reconstruction Acts withheld from the judges, it was denied the right of that vindication in the courts which it had reason to expect. For years unrepresented in the halls of Congress, and then misrepresented there by Scalawags and Carpetbaggers, the South had only one tribunal left—the Bar of History. As Benjamin H. Hill said:

Thus, denied by our enemies the opportunity of silencing, by the solemn judgments of their own courts, the fierce accusations of criminality in secession; and denied, by our enemies and the follies of our own people, the glorious chance of vindicating our cause in high debate, and face to face with the chosen champions of our accusers, we have but one resource left us for our defense or vin-

[33] *The Last Year of the War* (New York, 1866), 4.
[34] *The Southern Side; or, Andersonville Prison* (Baltimore, 1876), 6.

dication. That resource is history—impartial, and unpassioned, un-office-seeking history.

And further, "We owe it, therefore, to our dead, to our living, and to our children, to be active in the work of preserving the truth and repelling the falsehoods, so that we may secure, for them and for us, just judgment from the only tribunal before which we can be fully and fairly heard."[35] And Benjamin M. Palmer said, "Sir, there is a tribunal before which even nations must appear—a tribunal before which old causes shall be retried and the final verdict be rendered which can never again be reversed."[36]

In this new struggle, co-operation was no less desirable and necessary than in the war just ended. Historical workers should march together no less surely than soldiers, and ammunition should be garnered, stored, and used with as much precision. Thus, there was enacted the splendid spectacle of erstwhile warriors turned historians and conservers of history. Generals now became scholars.

On May Day, 1869, in the City of New Orleans, there was founded "by a number of gentlemen" the Southern Historical Society. The organization of this society was suggested by General Dabney H. Maury, and among the gentlemen who participated in the first meeting were General Maury, General Braxton Bragg, General S. B. Buckner, General P. G. T. Beauregard, and Reverend Benjamin M. Palmer. They might well have called their organization the Confederate Historical Society, for so it was and always remained. Benjamin M. Palmer, an eminent Presbyterian devine, was elected president, and the work of collecting documents was started.[37]

It was soon seen that the location of New Orleans was unfavorable to the success of the venture, and so in 1873 the executive committee issued a call for a meeting of the Society to be held on August 14 at Montgomery White Sulphur Springs in Virginia. Here delegates from twelve Southern states met, "embracing some of the most distinguished

[35] B. H. Hill, Jr., *Senator Benjamin H. Hill of Georgia. His Life, Speeches and Writings* (Atlanta, 1893), 405, 406.

[36] *Southern Historical Society Papers* (Richmond), X (1882), 253.

[37] *Ibid.*, I (1876), 39, 40; VI (1878), 244, 245.

soldiers and civilians of the Confederacy," and unanimously agreed to reorganize the Society. A grand confederation of historical societies was planned. The parent society should be located in Virginia and all of its officials should be residents of that state, with the exception of its vice-presidents. The latter should each be president of a state society, and throughout the states were to be organized federated local societies. Voting in the parent society should be by states and each state should have two votes. General Jubal A. Early was elected president of this reorganized Southern Historical Society and the Reverend J. William Jones, secretary-treasurer. The vice-presidents for the various states were as follows: R. M. T. Hunter for Virginia, General Isaac R. Trimble for Maryland, Governor Zebulon B. Vance for North Carolina, General M. C. Butler for South Carolina, General A. H. Colquitt for Georgia, Colonel W. Call for Florida, Admiral Raphael Semmes for Alabama, General William T. Martin for Mississippi, General J. B. Hood for Louisiana, Colonel T. M. Jack for Texas, Governor A. H. Garland for Arkansas, Governor Isham G. Harris for Tennessee, General J. S. Marmaduke for Missouri, General S. B. Buckner for Kentucky, and W. W. Corcoran, a Washington philanthropist, for the District of Columbia.

Little was ever done to give life to the state branches, though the ones in Kentucky, Louisiana, Georgia, and North Carolina seem to have existed for a time. In 1879 Buckner resigned from the presidency of the Kentucky branch and was succeeded by General William Preston; Benjamin M. Palmer soon became president of the Louisiana branch with Hood, Beauregard, and others as vice-presidents; Benjamin H. Hill helped to organize the Georgia branch; and the North Carolina branch seems to have bespoke its existence more becomingly than any of the others, in publishing four volumes (1874-1876) of a periodical called *Our Living and Our Dead; Devoted to North Carolina—her Past, her Present, and her Future.*[88]

[88] *Ibid.*, I (1876), 40, 43, 44; VI (1878), 244, 245; VII (1879), 159, 253, 254; *Handbook of Learned Societies and Institutions, America* (Washington, 1908), 90.

The general purpose of the Southern Historical Society has been stated, but to be more specific, it set out to collect, classify, and preserve "all the documents and facts bearing upon the eventful history of the past few years, illustrating the nature of the struggle from which the country has just emerged, defining and vindicating the principles which lay beneath it, and marking the stages through which it was conducted to its issue." Its work should not be "purely sectional" nor of a "partisan character."[39] No time should be lost; the South was standing "upon the outer verge of a great historical cycle, within which a completed past will shortly be enclosed." Southerners must discharge a duty to their fathers whose principles they inherited and "to the children, who will then know whether to honor or dishonor the sires that begot them," and pay a debt to the dead on the battlefields from the Susquehanna to the Rio Grande.[40] The two greatest perils were time and the Federal government. Each day that passed saw documents lost, discarded, or accidentally burned; and the Federal government was systematically gathering all Confederate records possible. Added to the many documents it had captured at the end of the war, it had just recently bought for seventy-five thousand dollars from Colonel John T. Pickett five trunks of important Confederate archives. The policy of the government toward the use of this historical material by Southerners was most illiberal. Though the secretary of war was anxious to get copies of all documents owned by the Society, he consistently refused to allow representatives of that Society to have copies of Confederate records in his possession or even to see them.[41]

The Society immediately spread throughout the South its appeal for papers and documents. It wanted everything which could illuminate the history of the South, books, newspapers, manuscript material of all sorts, military reports, maps, charts, speeches, sermons, economic and

[39] *Southern Historical Society Papers*, I (1876), 41.

[40] *Ibid.*, 42.

[41] *Ibid.*, II (1876), 248, 249; V (1878), 35; VI (1878), 191, 192. In 1878 the secretary of war finally allowed Southerners to have access to these documents. *Ibid.*, VI (1878), 239, 240. During the period when these papers were not open to unrestricted use, it was easy to exclude the Southerners.

social material, poetry, ballads, songs, and anything else that the people would send. It was as much an act of patriotism now to send in this material as it had been in 1861 to join the Confederate army. The appeal did not go unheeded. There was a great outpouring of historical material throughout the former Confederacy, and within two years the Society was able to report that it expected soon to have accumulated "a complete arsenal from which the defenders of our cause may draw any desired weapon."[42] To guarantee the safety of this material, the Virginia legislature gave the Society quarters in the state capitol, where its archives would be as safe as those of the state government.[43]

As for the publication of a definitive history of the Confederacy and of the war, there was a general feeling that such an undertaking should wait for a future generation. In writing his *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* Jefferson Davis said that he had "sought to furnish material for the future historian, who, when the passions and prejudices of the day shall have given place to reason and sober thought, may, better than a contemporary, investigate the causes, conduct, and results of the war."[44] And John B. Gordon declared as late as 1903, "The man capable of writing it with entire justice to both sides is perhaps yet unborn."[45]

The Society disclaimed any intention of promoting a history of the war; its great task was to make available the material on which the future historian must rest his account. The Society, however, was not to forego all publication activities. It decided to publish various documents for the interest they would have for the contemporary generation, and as a complete guarantee against the loss of the material itself. The necessity was further heightened by the fact that in 1874 Congress had ordered the beginning of the publication of the official records of

[42] *Ibid.*, I (1876), 44.

[43] This Society gathered together the finest collection of Confederate material in existence. It was later turned over to the Confederate Memorial Literary Society, which preserves it in Richmond.

[44] Preface, iii.

[45] *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York, 1903), preface, xi.

the Union and Confederate armies, which work ultimately ran into one hundred and twenty-eight volumes and cost almost three million dollars, being the well-known *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.* At first there was a deep suspicion among Southerners, born not entirely without reason, that the Confederate records and dispatches would not be faithfully reproduced. Here was an immediate task for the Southern Historical Society; it should begin the publication of its Confederate records. Beginning in January, 1874, and continuing for a year and a half the Society, under contract with the Messrs. Turnbull of Baltimore, published twenty pages each month in the *Southern Magazine.*[46] This arrangement, being a makeshift, was naturally unsatisfactory, and so in January, 1876, the Society began a monthly journal of its own, which it called the *Southern Historical Society Papers.* The editor announced this policy: "We shall publish nothing which does not bear directly on the War Between the States, and proper understanding of the measures, men and deeds of those stirring times."[47] He hoped "that those who are interested in vindicating the truth of Confederate History will sustain the enterprise and make it a complete success."[48] This publication for fourteen years ran as a monthly, it then became annual, and within recent years it has appeared only occasionally. It has included a great many valuable documents.

The success of the *Papers* in the beginning was greatly aided by a yearly contribution of five hundred dollars made by W. W. Corcoran of Washington. Depending upon such donations and upon the sale of its publications, the Society after a few years was much encumbered with debts, and there was for a time danger that it might be forced to hand over its valuable collections to its creditors, and disband. J. William Jones, the secretary of the Society and the editor of the *Papers,* made heroic efforts to save the situation; Confederate leaders took to the lecture platform to raise money for an endowment; and Jefferson

[46] *Southern Historical Society Papers,* I (1876), 46; VI (1878), 245.
[47] *Ibid.,* I (1876), 108.
[48] *Ibid.,* 39.

Davis was asked to tour the South in the interest of the Society. Though not entering onto a speaking trip, the former Confederate president spoke in New Orleans in 1882 before a meeting which raised for the Society more than fifteen hundred dollars.[49] After Jones had passed on, the Society became somewhat inactive, though it has never disbanded in name. Its president now is Douglas Southall Freeman, the author of the recent biography of Robert E. Lee.

All of the historical activity in the South following the Civil War was not predicated upon or bound up with that unfortunate struggle. In the period from 1865 to the end of the century, able scholars set to work in every Southern state to rewrite state history or to bring up some of the lagging states like Mississippi and Arkansas. To name only a few: J. T. Scharf in Maryland, Philip A. Bruce and John Esten Cooke in Virginia, Stephen B. Weeks and Samuel A. Ashe in North Carolina, Edward McCrady in South Carolina, C. C. Jones, Jr., in Georgia, George R. Fairbanks in Florida, William Garret Brown, Peter J. Hamilton, and Thomas M. Owen in Alabama, J. F. H. Claiborne, Robert Lowery, and W. H. McCardle in Mississippi, Charles Gayarré and Grace King in Louisiana, George P. Garrison in Texas, John H. Reynolds in Arkansas, W. R. Garrett and A. V. Goodpasture in Tennessee, and Richard H. Collins and Z. F. Smith in Kentucky. The historians since 1900 are too numerous to mention and it would be invidious to make selections.

The historical societies went into eclipse during the Civil War, but since that time all of them have been revived, new ones have been organized, and the tendency has been within the last half century for these organizations either to become state historical commissions or to enter into arrangements whereby state aid is given. Thus, have most of the state governments at last awakened to the necessity of taking care of their historical records. The most satisfactory developments along this line have taken place in North Carolina, Mississippi, and Texas. Texas and Arkansas, which had no historical societies in ante-bellum

[49] *Ibid.*, X (1882), 253; Dunbar Rowland (ed.), *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches* (Jackson, Miss., 1923), IX, 141, 142; X, 112.

times, organized respectively the Texas Historical Association in 1897 and the Arkansas Historical Association in 1903.[50] Another evidence of progress in this newer age was the appearance of historical magazines in practically every state, issued either by the state historical society or the state historical commission. The publications of these organizations are now voluminous.

State governments have shown their interest in historical activities not only by the organization of historical commissions, but many of them have financed the copying of their records in Europe and provided for their publication. North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia are notable examples of states engaging in this work.

The activities of individuals in writing histories and of states in carrying on the work of historical commissions showed that there was ample enthusiasm for history other than that based on the Confederate War. It was inevitable that the Southern Historical Society should be forced to broaden its interests or another society would be organized to cover the non-Confederate aspects of Southern history. The Southern Historical Society was born Confederate and it has always remained so; therefore, a new historical society grew up for the South, not for another Southern state. And since Confederates ran the Southern Historical Society no less than they had run the war, it was to be expected that nonparticipants in the war would have much to do with the new society.

The election of a Democrat in 1892 to be president of the United States seems to have been an adventitious cause for the founding of a new Southern historical society; for President Cleveland brought to Washington into the government service many able Southerners. With the driving force coming from this source, there was sent out from Washington in 1896 an invitation signed by nearly a hundred names, calling for a new Southern historical organization. The people represented in the call were widely scattered and represented various pro-

[50] See Charles W. Ramsdell, "The Preservation of Texas History," in *North Carolina Historical Review,* VI (1929), 1-16; David Y. Thomas, "The Preservation of Arkansas History," *ibid.,* V (1928), 263-74.

fessions. There were the inevitable Confederate generals, such as Wade Hampton, M. C. Butler, and George Washington Custis Lee; there were college professors such as Woodrow Wilson of Princeton University and Kemp Plummer Battle of the University of North Carolina; and such other able leaders as Jabez L. M. Curry, Walter Hines Page, Richard Malcom Johnston, and Stephen B. Weeks. Also six college presidents signed the call. This was not considered to be a movement of hostility against the Southern Historical Society, for the secretary of that organization, Colonel R. A. Brock, signed the call.[51]

The first meeting was held on April 24, 1896, at Columbian University in Washington (now George Washington University), with Stephen B. Weeks in the chair. Jabez L. M. Curry was chosen temporary president, and after various remarks, including a speech by General Butler on the backwardness of the South in preserving its historical records, a constitution was adopted. The name first suggested was "An Association for the Study of Southern History," but its manifest clumsiness led to the adoption of the title, "Southern History Association." William L. Wilson of West Virginia, Cleveland's postmaster general, was elected president; and among the vice-presidents were Jabez L. M. Curry, Marcus J. Wright, Thomas Nelson Page, and Woodrow Wilson.[52]

The purpose of the new organization was "the encouragement of original research, discussion, and conference among members, the widening of personal acquaintance, publication of work, and the collection of historical materials."[53] This association embraced the modern ideas of historical activities. According to the old traditions, historical societies should have a set of officers and a library and there should be a membership, not too widespread, and there should be annual meetings, at which orations should be delivered but at which, as time went on, it often happened that nothing was done more exciting than reading the official reports. This new society had got inspiration from

[51] *Publications of the Southern History Association* (Washington), I (1897), 2-4.
[52] *Ibid.*, 4-8.
[53] *Ibid.*, 1.

the American Historical Association, which had been organized in 1884, and which in 1895 had started a historical periodical, the *American Historical Review.* There were to be annual meetings at which carefully prepared papers should be read, which should later be published in a journal. The first annual meeting was held on June 12, 1896, papers were read, and seventy-nine members were enrolled. In January following, the first issue of the Association's journal appeared, called *Publications of the Southern History Association.*[54]

This Association started out with the resolution that there was much work to be done. Stephen B. Weeks, in a paper "On the Promotion of Historical Studies in the South," said, "In no respect, perhaps, has the South been more silent, more careless of her own duty to herself, than in the matter of history writing and book collecting. We complain that Northern men and foreigners misunderstand and misrepresent us. Who is responsible for this misunderstanding and misrepresentation but ourselves?"[55] This Association seems never to have made a collection of its own as did the Southern Historical Society; but it published in its journal a number of valuable historical articles and conducted for the South its first modern historical magazine. Papers on all periods of Southern history were published, documents were included, and books were reviewed. This publication never came under the domination of college professors and educational institutions, and, perhaps, in that fact its life was shortened. Indeed, it came to look upon the type of history the college professor taught and wrote as almost useless. By the coming of the new century, there was much being said about scientific history and objective history writing. The editor of the *Publications* was downright against both. Concerning the former, he said in 1907, "The one distinguishing and inevitable mark of scientific history thus far is dullness, deep, dense, supreme, unrelieved by glimpse of nature or spark of life."[56]

[54] *Ibid.*, 9.
[55] *Ibid.*, 32.
[56] *Ibid.*, XI (1907), 303.

But the Southern History Association never succeeded in making itself much more than a society of Southern gentlemen residing in Washington. Its days, too, were numbered. With the coming of the Republicans in 1897, Postmaster General William L. Wilson, president of the Association, retired from office and left Washington. Jabez L. M. Curry was elected president and served until his death in 1903, when Marcus J. Wright was elected to succeed him. Soon the annual meetings dwindled in importance until they were held in the office of the president, and in 1907 the last issue of the *Publications of the Southern History Association* appeared. The membership of the Association never grew far beyond two hundred.[57] The dictum seemed to be fixed and final that historical societies of broader interests than state lines could not be properly nurtured by generals, editors, diplomats, and governmental employees alone. Something more seemed to be needed.

And then the era of the college professor and of the educational institution arrived. The stabilizing influences produced by these factors have led to the organization and continuance of many learned societies, whose days may also be numbered, but the end is not yet in sight. The scientific objective history of the college professor has been tempered in recent years with more artistry. The old saying that "If it is interesting it is not history" no longer holds. The college professor today is beginning to see that there is art as well as science in history-writing, and this discovery may add many cubits to the size of historical societies and many days to their life. We may all hope with reason that this newly-organized Southern Historical Association will live for many years to perform a work that has long waited to be done.

[57] *Ibid.*, II (1898), 4, 7; III (1899), 180, 181; VI (1902), 457; VII (1903), 69. In 1902 Thomas M. Owen and Joel C. Du Bose began the publication of the *Gulf States Historical Magazine* (Montgomery, Birmingham), which ran for two years, and then failed on account of finances. It was not the organ of an historical association.